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Red Oaks zoning has residents seeing red



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Residents of the Red Oaks subdivision in Cedar Park would prefer land just outside their subdivision on Liberty Oaks Boulevard not be zoned for apartments.

Posted Thursday, January 22, 2009 5:00 pm

by Jenn Rains, Hill Country News

Construction on the Red Oaks subdivision is well under way in Cedar Park with homes being sold for up to half a million dollars. The neighborhood also enjoys a close community atmosphere with residents getting together to socialize and do service projects.

But now residents in this neighborhood nestled off Cypress Creek Road may have a problem to face - the possibility of an apartment complex being built on the outskirts of their subdivision.

Pohl Brown and Associates (PBA) currently markets 15.8 acres of land owned by New Amstel Land, Ltd. on the southwest corner of Cypress Creek Road and Liberty Oaks Boulevard that is zoned for Planned Development (PD). However, they are seeking a zoning change to Multi-Family (MF) which would allow an apartment to be built on that tract.

The case was originally supposed to be heard at the Planning and Zoning Commission meeting on Jan. 20, but was postponed until the Feb. 3 meeting because representatives from PBA have scheduled a meeting with Red Oaks residents.

The property zoning for Planned Development allows for office-type use, said Amy Link, Cedar Park senior planner. She said the proposal from Pohl Brown is to take it out of the planned development and make it multi-family zoning.

Jennie Braasch with PBA said the proposed change is due to the location being very difficult for the current zoning. She cited the Galleria at Red Oaks, an office complex at the corner of Cypress Creek and Liberty Oaks as an example.

"If you look at the office that is currently built [there], you'll see they are sitting empty and have been for about a year," she said.

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Bill Pohl of Pohl Brown and Associates said the problem with the 15-acre tract of land is that it doesn't have the visibility for office use and the company has been unsuccessful at multiple attempts to sell the property under the current zoning.

"We've never tried to make anybody mad and we've tried to get that sold under the zoning the city would like, but it's impossible to sell," he said.

While a zoning of multi-family would make the tract viable and enable PBA to market it, residents of the Red Oaks neighborhood are against the prospect.

Christine Weckel, a resident of the subdivision, said when she first looked at buying her land, she asked not only the developer, but also the city what that tract was zoned for and was told office condos.

"I'm OK with office condos and understood that they would be built there, but not apartments," Weckel said.

She said neighbors found out about the proposed zoning when a sign was placed on the tract announcing the meeting.

"Across the board, no one wants apartments in this location for a number of reasons," she said. "We're not opposed to development there. We just don't want to see three-story apartments."

Red Oaks resident Rachelle Honohan said she doesn't want anybody living in an apartment to have hurt feelings, but she doesn't think it's the best environment for the area. "I'm not opposed to people living in apartments because we've all lived in them, but the majority of individuals who do live in an apartment are short term," she said.

Weckel cited a drop in property value, more crime and traffic as several of the issues residents have with apartments in that location.

Honohan said her concern is about the school atmosphere, especially since a campus might be built in the subdivision in the next few years.

"I just think that there are quite a few apartments around the area and Red Oaks will be getting a school in the area," she said. "It's not best for a school to have the majority of kids from apartments versus single-home dwellings. It's just not as stable an environment in the classroom and school."

Link said the city has not received any information that PBA has a buyer for the land or a plan at this point. "As far as we know, they don't have anyone on contract for the property. They don't have a site plan ready to come in," she said. "They're just thinking maybe multi-family is more marketable than what it is now."

Residents think otherwise though. Honohan spoke with Braasch after the Planning and Zoning meeting on Tuesday and said she was under the impression that a buyer had been found. "She indicated that he's (buyer) putting a contract on the land even though we are against it," she said.

Pohl confirmed that there is a contract pending on the land, but that it's subject to the zoning change.

PBA is scheduled to meet with residents on Saturday to hear the concerns. "We want to hear their thoughts and needs," Pohl said, and added they're willing to try and reach an agreement.

Red Oaks residents are also meeting on Sunday to get organized and prepared for the Feb. 3 meeting. "We're going to be marshaling our forces between now and then," Weckel said.

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